

## Collecting in the Hot Summer, 1976

By DAVID C. G. BROWN\*

Emerging from my winter hibernation, I drove to Salcey Forest, Northamptonshire, on 5th April. Although rather breezy it remained at 47°F. until my departure at 11.20 p.m. when the following had come to m.v. light: 12 *Cerastis rubricosa* Schiff., 3 *Orthosia gothica* Linn., 30 *O. cruda* Schiff., 30 *O. stabilis* Schiff., 2 *O. munda* Schiff., 4 *O. incerta* Hufn., 5 *Xylocampa areola* Esp., 4 *Conistra vaccinii* Linn., 1 *Alsophila aescularia* Schiff., 15 *Earophila badiata* Schiff., 2 *Selenia bilunaria* Esp., 2 *Biston strataria* Hufn. and 2 *Ectropis biundularia* Borkh.

Three days later at this same site *Orthosia populeti* Fab., *Anticlea derivata* Schiff., *Eupithecia abbreviata* Steph. and *Erannis marginaria* Fab. were additions.

Later that week on a clear moonlit night Oversley Wood in Warwickshire produced 20 species of macros, including 1 *Achlya flavicornis* Linn., 7 *Panolis flammea* Schiff., 20 *O. populeti*, 1 *Eupithecia castigata* Hübn. and 12 *Trichopteryx carpinata* Borkh.

On the 11th I began my now annual quest for *Orthosia miniosa* Schiff. I arrived at Lyndhurst at 8.20 p.m. to find cloudy conditions had been left behind in Warwickshire and I was now confronted with clear moonlit skies and a bitterly cold still air which the New Forest always seems to produce at this time of year on such clear nights.

The m.v. traps produced only 13 usual spring species. The following day I drove to another part of Hampshire to find *Panaxia dominula* Linn. larvae plentiful on comfrey plants, the larvae were already three-quarters grown.

Back in the Forest that evening, I had similar conditions to the previous night and the only species worthy of a mention were 2 *Polyplocia ridens* Fab. and 2 *P. flammea*; the latter seemed to be enjoying a good year.

On 18th April I was operating my m.v. traps on Royston Heath, Hertfordshire, for *Orthosia opima* Schiff., and despite the clear skies and low temperature 4 appeared in good condition. The following morning I travelled on to Barton Mills in Suffolk and carefully examined catkins under the Black Poplar trees growing by the roadsides. I managed to find 14 small larvae of *Cirrhia ocellaris* Borkh. It was a beautifully warm and sunny spring day and *Nymphalis io* L. and *Gonepteryx rhamni* L. were plentiful in the woods around Barton Mills. I tried my m.v. lights at Royston Heath once more that evening in an attempt to complete my series of *O. opima*. Unfortunately a very strong and cool breeze spoilt the evening and again only 4 specimens in variable condition arrived, all of which, I might add, were very late flying.

The following day I travelled with Andrew Gardner to the New Forest in a second attempt for *O. miniosa*. The skies

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were clear but it did not deter a reasonable number of species coming to the traps: 6 *Odontosia carmelita* Esp., 1 *Pheosia gnoma* Fab., 6 *Notodonta trepida* Esp., 15 *Chaonia ruficornis* Hufn., 5 *Panolis flammea*, 10 *P. ridens*, 1 *Orthosia gracilis*, 4 *Eupithecia irriguata* Hübn., 1 *Bapta distinctata* H.-S., 3 *Cleora cinctaria* Schiff. and, to my great delight, my first *O. miniosa*.

The next day we ferried across to the Isle of Wight from Lymington, where a taxi connected us to the *Melitaea cinxia* L. locality. As we walked down from the road towards the undercliff we were not prepared for the vast numbers of larvae we were to see. To say they were exceptionally common would be an understatement. It was difficult to walk along for a few hundred yards without treading on larvae. Having collected a small number we stayed to savour the remarkable site. We were amused to watch picnic makers trying to find somewhere to sit clear of little armies! The hot sunshine had caused great activity and several were found on the beach near the tide line, some 300 yards from any foliage. We wandered leisurely back on to the road well in time for our taxi to catch the ferry, and still marvelling at the sights we had seen. Very satisfactory specimens have since emerged and I had sufficient surplus to release numbers in my breeding garden and take the opportunity of adding another species to my photographic record.

In the New Forest that evening we changed our location to Brockenhurst and were rewarded with 3 female *miniosa* which all laid well and proved easy to rear on young oak leaves. A female *Lithophane ornitopus* Hufn. was another welcome visitor, but it was unfortunate that when I did finally learn that this species was a cannibal it was too late! Other notable species at m.v. were 8 *E. irriguata*, 2 *B. distinctata*, 3 *O. carmelita* and 11 *P. flammea*.

We were back at this same location on 8th May when we each took a very fresh series of *Ligdia adustata* Schiff., another species which seemed to be well suited to the very warm year. Over 80 *N. trepida* were counted, including a very dark specimen, 2 *Drepana cultraria* Fab., 10 *Drepana binaria* Hufn., 1 *Drepana falcataria* L., 8 *Drepana lacertinaria*, 6 *Drymonia dodonaea* Schiff., 3 *P. flammea*, 2 *Cosymbia albipunctata* Hufn., 8 *Cosymbia punctaria* L., 12 *E. irriguata*, 6 *Chloroclysta miata* Linn., 1 *Lampropteryx suffumata* Schiff., 2 *Cleora cinctaria*, 4 *Ectropis consonaria* Hübn., 1 *B. distinctata*, 2 *B. bimaculata* Fab., and 3 *Semiothisa alternaria* Hübn. were notable species on this hot night.

Our venue for the night of 22nd May was Tintern in the Wye Valley. After another warm and sunny day the temperature remained high for m.v. operations. A good 60 species of macros came to the traps, including 12 *N. trepida*, 4 *Stauropus fagi* Linn., 1 *Tethea fluctuosa* Hübn., 18 *D. cultraria*, 1 *Apatele alni* Linn., 1 *L. suffumata* Schiff., 18 *Anaitis plagiata* Linn., 1 *B. bimaculata*, 2 *L. adustata*, 2 *Selenia lunaria* Schiff.,

3 *Cepphis advenaria* Hübn., 1 *Deileptenia ribeata* Clerck, 28 *E. consonaria* and 6 *Acasis viretata* Hübn.

A warm overcast night in Warwickshire at Oversley Wood on 28th May produced 6 *Harpyia bifida* Brahm, 2 *Tethea* or Schiff., 10 *Clostera curtula* Linn., 4 *A. alni*, 1 *Xanthorhoe designata* Hufn. and 2 *S. lunaria*.

Distant Scotland was my destination on the 30th May. I arrived at Struan by 5 p.m. Sugar that night on the now famous *laponaria* posts was rather disappointing in that only 3 species were noted: *Eumichtis adusta* Esp., *Hada nana* Hufn. and *Scoliopteryx libatrix* Linn. The m.v. traps were run until dawn by the Bog Myrtle and gave me my first *Dyscia fagaria* Thunb. also *Apatele menyanthidis* View. and surprisingly a male *Macrothylacia rubi* Linn. Another m.v. trap which had been operated from a house in Trinafour village produced the Scottish form of *Pheosia tremula* Clerck.

Despite rain all night the skies were still heavy and it continued all day, increasing in strength as dusk approached. Sugar around the edge of the Aviemore Reserve was consequently very poor once more. The m.v. traps on Granish Moor were better in producing a very whitish *Apatele leporina* Linn., *Hydriomena coerulata* Fab., 12 *Ortholitha mucronata* Scop. (*scotica*), and *Chesias rufata* Fab. (*scotica*).

Another m.v. trap situated on a rocky hillside had resulted in large numbers, including 4 *Hadena bombycina* Hufn. Next morning it was still raining hard and I waited patiently for it to abate, but by early afternoon it was clearly evident that this was not to be and accordingly I set about searching the young birches on Granish Moor in the pouring rain for *Endromis versicolora* Linn. Egg batches proved fairly easy to find but the resultant larvae were rather more difficult to rear and only a small number of pupae were obtained, despite rearing many to the last instar successfully. *Lasiocampa callunae* L. larvae were very common on the saturated heather and birches with a few *Dasychira fascelina* Linn. larvae.

That evening I set up my traps in birch woods near Kincaig and then drove back to Aviemore Reserve to inspect my extensive sugar round which again failed to produce *rectilinea*. With this disappointment added to a poor m.v. catch and the continuing diabolical weather, I was persuaded the next morning to head southwards. I stopped in Yorkshire to look for *Orygia recens* Hufn. larvae in two localities but with no luck. I headed southwards to Derbyshire to set up traps on the moors for the night, meeting Brian Elliott en route. The catch was however disappointing and only 3 *H. bombycina* are worth mentioning.

Gusset Wood in the Chilterns on 7th June produced *A. alni*, *Euchoeca nebulata* Scop., *Discoloxia blomeri* Curt., *Eupithecia venosata* Fab. and *Pseudoboarmia punctinalis* Scop.

On 19th June I was setting my traps in torrential rain at Tintern. Although no *Drepana harpagula* Esp. appeared, *A. alni*, *Craniophora ligustri* Schiff., *Anaplectoides prasina* Schiff.,

*Deileptenia ribeata* Clerck and *Ectropis consonaria* Hübn. added interest to a long list of species.

Returning to the Chilterns on 22nd June, I met Bernard Skinner there and a good 91 species of macros came to the traps including *Apamea sublustris* Esp.

On 25th June Andrew and I set off for Sandwich in sweltering heat. We set our m.v. traps near the golf course in very hot and sticky conditions. The following arrived: 3 *Deilephila porcellus* Linn., 1 *Leucoma salicis* L., 1 *Euproctis chryssorrhoea* L., over 300 *Agrotis clavis* Hufn., 3 *Agrotis ripae* Hübn., 20 *Agrotis vestigialis* Hufn., 6 *Euxoa tritici* L., 3 *Helio-phobus albicolon* Hübn., 4 *Hadena suasa* Schiff., 3 *H. bicolorata* Hufn., 45 *A. sublustris*, 3 *Pyrrhia umbra* Hufn., 2 *Spilosoma urticae* Esp., 9 *Eilema pygmaeloa* Doubl., 12 *Aplasta ononaria* Fuessl., 4 *Sterrrha ochrata* Scop. and over 40 *Mesotype virgata* Hufn. The last two species mentioned were flushed out of the herbage even more commonly during the daytime. *Macroglossum stellatarum* Linn. was very common hovering over the vipers bugloss and we both netted a reasonable series.

Our last night was equally hot and a long list of macros was made with *Leucania obsoleta* Hübn. and *Comacla senex* Hübn. being additions.

The hot weather continued on 1st July when I managed to catch two female *Trisateles emortualis* Schiff. in the Chilterns but both refused to lay for me.

Local Oversley Wood was visited on 3rd July on a hot and overcast night at 74°F. A bumper 124 species of macros turned up at the m.v. lights: 4 *Harpyia furcula* Clerck, 1 *Apamea scolopacina* Esp., 14 *Parastictis suspecta* Hübn., 5 *Schranksia costaestrigalis* Steph., 3 *Miltochrista miniata* Forst., 5 *Xanthorhoe quadrifasiata* Clerck, 1 *Mesoleuca albicillata* Linn., 15 *Lygris populata* Linn., 5 *Rheumaptera undulata* Linn. and surprisingly *Thecla quercus* Linn. and 2 *Aphantopus hyperantus* Linn.!

The following night in Salcey Forest 127 species of macros visited the lights, including 1 *Spaelotis ravidata* Schiff., 6 *Arenostola fluxa* Hübn., 1 *A. sublustris*, 5 *A. scolopacina*, 1 *Zenobia subtusa* Schiff., 5 *Hemistola immaculata* Thunb., 1 *Cosymbia porata* L., 2 *X. quadrifasiata*, 6 *Melanthia procellata* Schiff., and 1 *Horisme vitalbata* Schiff. Further visits to the same site on the sweltering nights of 6th and 7th July each produced species totals of well over a hundred.

The hot summer was now well established when I visited Cambridgeshire on 17th July. Chippenham Fen that evening produced 124 species of macros, the best of which were: two very large *Sphinx ligustri* Linn., 1 *Lophopteryx cucullina* Schiff., 4 *H. suasa*, 16 *Arenostola phragmitidis* Hübn., 6 *Chilodes maritima* Tausch., 3 *C. ligustri*, 1 *Apamea unanimitis* Hübn., 4 *A. ophiogramma* Esp., 3 *Coenobia rufa* Haw., 2 fresh *Eustrotia bankiana* Fab., 7 *Lygephila pastinum* Treits., 1 *Sterrrha straminata* Borkh., 2 *Lygris prunata* Linn. and 10 *Lygris testata* Linn. Another trap at the village of Swaffham

Prior on this overcast night had produced the following: 1 *A. phragmitidis*, 1 *Cosmia affinis* Linn., 2 *Mesotype virgata* Hufn., 1 *Horisme vitalbata* and 1 *Horisme tersata* Schiff. The following night was clearer and produced much the same species, with the exception of a fresh *Phragmataecia castaneae* Hübn. at Chippenham. From here I continued eastwards on 19th July and visited Mr. H. E. Chipperfield at Walberswick to find there also Messrs. Britton and Saunders. "Chip", as I found him to be called, was most helpful in his knowledge of the local sites and together the three of us set our traps beside the extensive reed beds after a very heavy shower had passed overhead. 6 *H. suasa*, 15 *Leucania straminea* Treits., 10 *Simyra venosa* Borkh., 24 *Apamea oblonga* Haw. (most of which were in the actinics), 12 *Celaena leucostigma* Hübn., 2 *Hydraecia paludis* Tutt, 8 *Hydraecia lucens* Freyer, 50 *Arenostola brevilinea* Fenn, 30 *A. phragmitidis*, 2 *Nonagria dissoluta* Treits., 8 *Nonagria neurica* Hübn., 15 *C. maritima*, 1 *Eustrotia uncula* Clerck, 3 *Zanclognatha cribrumalis* Hübn., 1 *Lasiocampa callunae* L., and 5 *C. senex* were noted. The next evening we searched the marram heads at Southwold after dark for *Euxoa cursoria* Hufn. which seemed distinctly localised, a favourite area being very near to the shore. Searching the Lyme Grass revealed a few fresh *Arenostola elymi* Treits. The traps which were left to run until dawn only produced 3 *cursoria* and 5 *elymi*. Other traps at Walberswick had produced similar species to the previous night. On the 21st *Hyloicus pinastri* Linn. was a surprise at a trap placed in the reed beds. On the 22nd *Papilio machaon* L. larvae were found to be fully grown in the Broads and one imago was seen. That night at Southwold the cooler air seemed to favour searching the marram heads as *cursoria* and *elymi* were more common than on previous nights.

My next trip was North to Derbyshire in a bid for *Plusia interrogationis* Linn. The early evening of 26th July seemed ideal, so I set off feeling confident to the calm moorland. On arrival I found John Fenn and two local Derbyshire collectors were already setting up their traps. *P. interrogationis* was in very fresh condition and other good "plusias" were *festucae* and *bractea*. The next morning I inspected moorland posts with John. It was rather breezy and sunny and we found that *interrogationis* preferred to rest on old tree stumps which gave it excellent camouflage and also made it very difficult for us to box. Two *Apatele menyanthidis* View. and 1 *Saturnia pavonia* Linn. larvae were also found. The pleasant day breeze suddenly developed into a very wild gale force wind shortly before dusk and spoiled a promising night. Indeed, by midnight the wind was even stronger and I was surprised to find 25 species of macros in the traps the next morning, including the required 2 *interrogationis* to complete my series.

A surprise at Oversley Wood in Warwickshire on 2nd August were two immaculate *Harpyia bicuspis* Borkh. which were almost certainly part of a second brood in this excep-

tionally hot year. I would be interested to know if there are any other records of second brood *bicuspis*.

On 7th August I left England for a fortnight's collecting in Ireland with William Coster. I was impressed by the strangeness of the locations, and particularly the general desolation of such as the Burren. I have arranged with Bill to report on the detailed collecting in a separate article.

On 3rd September Andrew and I travelled to Kent, where, arriving at Dungeness shortly after dark, we set up two m.v. traps and two actinics. We then travelled a few miles inland and set up a further 4 m.v. traps near and amongst marsh mallow plants. On close inspection of the large plants with torches 4 *Hydraecia hucherardi* Mabille were located. The traps were left running until dawn when on inspection a further 3 *hucherardi* were found, also very welcome were 6 *Ennomos autumnaria* Wernb. The traps at Dungeness were most disappointing and contained very few moths, and, indeed no migrants.

There was great excitement in and around the bird observatory with numerous ornithologists dashing hurriedly to sight very rare migrant birds in the vicinity. The Dusky Thrush and Lesser Crested Tern. It was evident that there were no migrants of such note amongst the lepidoptera. The next night was extremely clear and cold, however shortly after dark 4 *hucherardi* were found on their foodplants and another 6 visited the traps—enough for us both to complete a reasonable series. Our other m.v.s left running by woodland had produced another *autumnaria*. We left Kent the next morning pleased with our excursion but rather surprised at the lack of migrants, especially after learning of such a good bird migration and also of a good lepidoptera migration in the south-west.

During September I regularly ran traps in local Warwickshire woods for *Anchoscelis helvola* Linn. but was surprised by its scarcity in woods where I had formerly seen it in good numbers. Surprises at Oakley Wood were *Aporophyla nigra* Haw. and *Antitype flaricincta* Schiff. on 18th and 24th respectively.

Gusset Wood in the Chilterns on 20th September produced only 15 species, including 4 beautifully marked *Tiliacea aurago* Schiff. Whilst Salcey Forest on 23rd September produced 20 species, including 6 *Asphalia diluta* Schiff., 3 *Dryobotodes eremita* Fab., 1 *Tiliacea citrage* Linn. and a small *Philudoria potatoria* Linn. which must have had a partial second brood in this remarkable year.

On 25th September Andrew and I again set out, this time for Dorset, arriving at Studland after a 3½-hour journey. We set up 4 m.v. traps and then took ourselves to Durlleston Head, Swanage, where we sited a further 4 m.v. traps from two generators and also 3 actinics. There was a torrential downpour as we were switching on and we dashed quickly up to the shelter of the car. This torrential downpour with strong winds eventually subsided into a clear night. We inspected the traps at 12.30 a.m. and were pleased to find about 30 *Aporophyla*

*australis* Boisd. which we both needed. Also plentiful were *Eumichtis lichenea* Hübn., *A. nigra*, *Leucochlaena hispida* Geyer and *Leucania l-album* Linn., while *Peridroma porphyria* Schiff. presented the only migrant. We topped up our generators and returned to the car for the night situated in the car park near the Castle Hotel. But there was calamity during the night! At 7 a.m. we rose as usual and made our expectant way down to the traps. The first thing I saw out of the ordinary was a cone from one of the traps lying isolated in some bushes. By now full of apprehension, we hurried on down and were horrified and dismayed by a sight perhaps dreaded more than any other by collectors—the complete wrecking of collecting equipment! My generator had been bodily lifted and thrown head over tail and the choke with it. Both traps had been dismembered and parts slung everywhere as if caught in a tornado. M.V. bulbs had been tossed down the cliff, but saved luckily by the long trail of flex, the reels landing up in tree branches having been prevented a full drop down the cliff. Other parts were found over a wide area. We walked angrily on towards Andrew's equipment which we found had suffered even worse treatment. His generator had been badly battered by blows from rocks and boulders. A petrol can was left unrecognisable.

Rather shattered by these events, we left the matter in the hands of the police and hurried anxiously over to the other traps at Studland rather later than anticipated. It was with some relief we found them intact. But just as gratifying and thrilling for me was to find a perfect *Agrius convoluli* L.—my first night-flying migrant hawkmoth. But even such a prize was overshadowed by the disaster at Durlleston Head and, at the time, my excitement was understandably dampened.

We travelled back to Warwickshire later in the morning feeling bewildered and despondent.

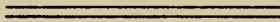
In a case such as this other collectors may be interested to appreciate that, apart from damage to equipment very considerable inconvenience and loss of collecting hours can ensue because the police necessarily retain the more damaged articles pending any court case.

As to whether collectors can insure against such an event happening is doubtful—human nature in some cases being what it is. Yet on the bright side, in 10 years collecting this has only happened once!

Nevertheless, after two weeks breathing space for recovery I found myself eager again for a night in the open collecting and set out for Dorset again on the 16th October, but this time determined to give Durlleston Head a wide berth. Seven m.v. lights were run at Studland in the shelter of the macrocarpa trees. Although rather breezy, a good 27 species of macros were noted. The active arrival of a Red Admiral at 10.30 p.m. caused the greatest excitement. *Lithophane leauteri* Boisd. was very common and 110 specimens were counted the following morning. Migrants continued to be scarce and were represented by 4 *P. porphyria* Schiff. and 1 *Leucania albipuncta* Schiff.

On the misty and mild evening of 25th October, Oversley Wood gave forth another surprise in the form of *L. ornitopus*. *Erranis defoliaria* Clerck was common and very variable as usual, and *Colotois pennaria* Linn. was extremely fresh and included some attractive dark red forms. The following day was similarly mild, calm and overcast and because the weather forecasters predicted no change I decided to set off for the New Forest at 1 p.m. But arriving at Brokenhurst at 4 p.m. I was surprised to find a clear sky and a corresponding drop in temperature. Undeterred by this, I sugared an extensive round of oaks and then set up my m.v. traps and actinics. In between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. there was a good deal at sugar, *C. vaccinii* being very common, also a few *Allophyes oxyacanthae* Linn., *Agrochola lota* Clerck, *A. circellaris* Hufn. and *Eupsilia transversa* Hufn. By 8 p.m. the temperature was as low as 38°F., but at 11.45 p.m. the sight of cloud cover was very welcome, this brought about a rise to 42°F. by 12.45 p.m. I kept my traps running until 6 a.m. by which time I had been rewarded for my patience with a very fresh *L. ornitopus*.

Looking back on 1976, it was a pleasure when collecting in such a hot summer to be able to set out fully confident of a dry expedition ahead. Yet even in such a season, there were times when I found myself drenched and looking angrily up at the opening skies. Although a good year for some of the better migrants, I was disappointed that in the main few of these came my way.



EARLY INSECT ACTIVITY IN THE STRATHCLYDE REGION. — In the early afternoon of 9th January, 1977 I found a single *Coccinella septempunctata* Linn. walking near the top of a fence post at the southern margin of the wood behind my house at Milton-of-Campsie. Although the day was sunny and quite mild, the beetle was on the shaded side of the post, not in the sun as might be expected.

One of the museum's taxidermists, Mr. D. Raines, reported to me that he had seen and captured a caterpillar walking on the snow on Ben Lomond at an altitude of 2,300 ft. (checked at time of capture with the Ordnance Survey map); also on the 9th. Unfortunately the creature later escaped, but the description may be of some use — about one inch long, brown with a yellow and black pattern, not hairy.

The weather over the Christmas and New Year period was noticeably milder than previously, with only a few frosts and no snow. This doubtless was an important factor in causing such early activity. On the night of the 9th, this milder spell was abruptly ended, two to three inches of snow falling, followed by prolonged frosts. — J. COOTER, Natural History Department, Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, G3 8AG.